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The Homeric Hymn to Hermes: Introduction, Text and Commentary by Athanassios Vergados (review)

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these texts from the brilliant but long-outdated work of Wilhelm and Capps; the inaccurate appendix of the second edition of Pickard-Cambridge's *Dramatic Festivals*; or the ill-organized, cramped, and overloaded edition of Mette.

This edition is above all based on close study of the stones themselves, which are described in detail and illustrated with forty-five clear photographs. The arguments for reconstructing the length of the full text and the placement of individual fragments are set forth elegantly; for the *Fasti* the authors refine the calculation of Capps to reconstruct eight columns of 141 lines each. They argue that the *Didascaliae* must have comprised seventy columns of text with approximately 130 lines each (60). Particularly impressive is the reconstruction of *IG* II² 2323, where it is clear that in some years there was no comic competition, and thus just a single line of text instead of between twelve and fifteen—but how many times and in which years (76–86)?

Yet a major aim has also been clarity, and these calculations are presented first in general, then in detail, then in summary, and each fragment is followed by separate epigraphic and then prosopographic (that is, literary and historical) commentary. The large-format pages allow complex texts to be reproduced with much accompanying information, and there are well-executed full-page diagrams of reconstructions on pages 26 and 92.

In the process of discussing these texts the authors make important new arguments, some of which will doubtless prove controversial:

Their examination (59) of the types of stone refutes the attractive hypothesis of Reisch that the *Didascaliae* and Victors' lists decorated a single building dedicated ca. 280 BCE. Millis and Olson accept (133) that the latter did in fact constitute a smaller structure dedicated then, although rectilinear rather than a hexagon as Reisch proposed.

They assume (76) that the phrase οὐκ ἐγένετο does not mean that the Dionysia or the competitions in general were not held, but rather that just the comedy or tragedy competition was omitted, probably in alternation (although not a regular one).

They argue (123–24) that later revivals of tragedy, comedy, and satyr play must have been exhibitions of single plays rather than competitions (despite the verb ἐνίκᾱ applied to their actors, which they explain as a previous competition on the model of a statement in [Plut.] *Lycurgus*), since otherwise one or more days would have had to be added to the schedule.

For completeness' sake, the so-called "Roman *Fasti*," a catalogue of each poet's record by festival and placement, is printed (without autopsy) and discussed in an appendix. This edition will be indispensable to any scholar of Greek theatre history. Since the indices are limited to the names in the texts of the inscriptions, a promised digital version will be particularly valuable.

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Athanassios Vergados. *The Homeric Hymn to Hermes: Introduction, Text and Commentary*. Texte und Kommentare, 41. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013. Pp. xiii, 717. \$182.00. ISBN 978-3-11-025969-8.

This long and much-awaited commentary to the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* is an excellent product of the revival of studies on the *Homeric Hymns* that has appeared in the last decade.¹ After Faulkner's publication of his commentary on the *Hymn to Aphrodite* (followed by another by Olson), the *Hymn to Hermes* was the only one among the four major *Hymns* still lacking a detailed analysis.² Vergados has undertaken this task with incomparable competence and produced a work that is due to become fundamental for students of archaic epic poetry.

The book begins with an introduction focusing on two important themes of the poem, reflection on music and poetry, and humor, which is followed by a section on the linguistic parallels between the *Hymn* and other works (Homer, Hesiod, and the other *Homeric Hymns*); it ends with a useful assessment of the relations between the *Hymn* and other versions of the same stories by coeval and later authors. This is then followed by a section on the problem of the date and place of composition and one on the transmission of the text. Afterwards comes the text with the apparatus and, finally, the detailed commentary on single passages.

The introduction (4–14) anticipates a fundamental theme: through the humorous narration of Hermes' invention of the lyre and its music, the *Hymn* represents one of the first reflections on the importance of the origins and functions of poetry in Greek literature. Hermes' first song is itself a hymn to Hermes, which narrates the affair between Maia and Zeus and his own birth, thus overlapping, though with some meaningful variations, with the beginning of the *Hymn* itself. Hermes' second song is a theogony that recounts how the gods obtained their *timai*, thus mirroring Hermes' own attempt at reaching legitimacy. With this sort of self-portrait the poet demonstrates, as Vergados (10) states, that he is well "aware of, and reflects on, the conventions of his traditional art." Nonetheless, the author's interpretation of both passages as examples of *mise en abyme* should not be stressed too much: Hermes' songs are accompanied by the lyre, which at the time of the composition of the *Hymn* (second half of the sixth century, as Vergados 145 also states) cannot reflect the performance of rhapsodic proems. It is better suited to citharodic compositions, which shared many elements with Hermes' song and have been considered by some to be the antecedents of the *Homeric Hymns*.³

The chapter on the date and place of composition (130–53) faces a much-disputed problem. Vergados examines the most significant proposals criticizing the historicist interpretations and the attempts to use single passages as time and place markers (for example the seven-stringed lyre or the allusion to

¹ See the new edition with commentary on the major *Hymns* by N. J. Richardson (*Three Homeric Hymns: To Apollo, Hermes, and Aphrodite. Hymns 3, 4, and 5*, Cambridge 2010) and the collected essays edited by A. Faulkner (*The Homeric Hymns: Interpretative Essays*, Oxford 2011).

² A. Faulkner, *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite: Introduction, Text and Commentary* (Oxford 2008); D. Olson, *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite and Related Texts* (Berlin 2012). Recent monographs on specific aspects of the *Hymn to Hermes* include D. Jallard, *Configurations d'Hermès. Une 'théogonie hermaïque'* (Liège 2007); C. Nobili, *L'Inno omerico a Ermete e le tradizioni locali* (Milan 2011).

³ H. Koller, "Das kitharodische Prooimion. Eine formgeschichtliche Untersuchung," *Philologus* 100 (1956) 154–205; G. Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca 1990) 353–61.

the Delphic sanctuary). Nevertheless, the elements he adduces go in the same direction and simply confirm the date of the *Hymn* in the second half of the sixth century accepted by most scholars. No attempts are made to define the place of composition, although Vergados (148) shows that an early Athenian reception is confirmed by the Atticisms and by the knowledge of the poem on the part of fifth-century vase painters and of Sophocles.

The strongest element in the volume, however, is the great number of linguistic parallels with other forms of epic that the poet adduces and discusses: such an attention to vocabulary illuminates the peculiarities of the *Hymn* in relation to other poems and its debts to the tradition. Vergados points to the many neologisms (such as αἰμυλομήτην and πωληδόκον, important in defining the attributes of this new god). The use of formulaic phrases is equally meaningful, so that Διὸς ἄλκιμος υἱός, used to define Hermes at line 101, is typical of Heracles, another precocious child and cattle raider; δολίης δ' οὐ λήθετο τέχνης (line 76) seems to be drawn from Hesiod (*Th.* 547, 660), where it is applied to Prometheus, a trickster figure who bears many similarities to Hermes (68–69, 320, 334).

The length of the commentary on single passages has no parallel in earlier commentaries; for example, ἀμβολάδην at l. 426, which earned only a three-line entry in Càssola's and Richardson's editions, now receives an extensive treatment, which includes ancient and modern theories about its connections with proems, its use in epic and lyric poetry, and its development into the dithyrambic ἀναβολή.

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Matthew Wright. *The Comedian as Critic: Greek Old Comedy and Poetics*. London: Bristol Classical Press, 2012. Pp. xi, 238. \$120.00. ISBN 978-1-7809-3029-9.

This book argues that old comedy engaged in literary criticism. This fairly reasonable assertion (*Frogs*, after all, tends to be standard reading for ancient literary theory courses) is supported by two rather surprising claims: that comedians generally aimed for an “elite” target audience and that they wrote primarily to be read later by these elite readers, not for popular performance. Wright is confidently reactionary against notions of performance culture (3–4, 142) and offers instead the idea of a reading culture. Different from some recent notions of reading culture as primarily social and performative (for example, W. Johnson, *AJP* 121 [2000] 593–627), Wright's notion is instead rather modern-looking: one where comedians in libraries assiduously plant allusions to be discovered later by equally assiduous readers.

Chapter 1, “Reading Comic Criticism,” spells out three positions that are important for the book as a whole: first that comedy was aimed to please an elite “target” audience rather than the masses (4–5); second that this “target” audience *read* comic texts (5); and, third, that comic humor makes any stated opinion suspect. This last position receives most of the chapter's attention: instead of offering a clear didactic program, the comedians are “playing around”